

The President's Daily Brief

March 13, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

LEBANON

Most military, political, and religious leaders have tentatively agreed that President Franjiyah must step down. Parliament is scheduled to meet today to approve a formula for a "legal" resignation.

Brigadier Ahdab apparently has decided to allow the politicians time to work out some face-saving procedure in order to win the all-important support of the right-wing Christian Phalanges Party.

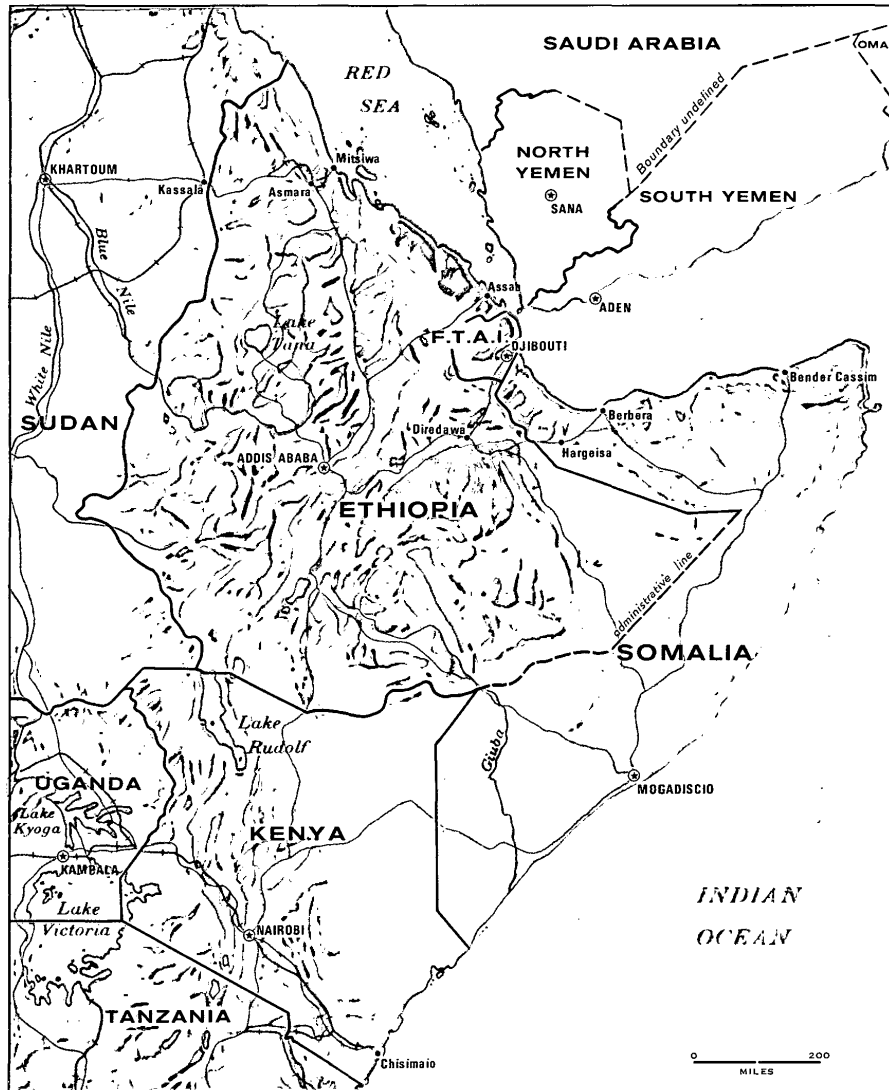
The President apparently recognizes that his support is eroding. At the same time, Christian political leaders are recognizing that Ahdab has the cooperation of most Christian officers in the army high command and is not proposing a revolutionary program that would threaten Christian interests.

If parliament proves unable to agree on a political solution to the crisis, however, or if Franjiyah balks, Ahdab will be likely to go ahead with his announced plan to establish a "military command council."

Israeli leaders met yesterday to evaluate the situation. We believe they will remain passive unless a change in Lebanon appears to affect the security of Israel's border or the safety of Israeli settlements.

For its part, Syria is likely to try to facilitate resolution of the political crisis in Beirut and to keep order in southern Lebanon to deny Israel an excuse to intervene. Damascus has adopted a publicly neutral position in the Ahdab-Franjiyah dispute, although Syrian officials hope to see Ahdab succeed.

The Horn of Africa



FRANCE-SOMALIA-ETHIOPIA

President Giscard has decided to move more quickly than had been anticipated to grant independence to the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (FTAI). He appears prepared to relinquish French base rights there rather than become involved in a potential military conflict.

When the French announced their decision late last year to grant independence to the territory, they specified no timetable but implied the process could take up to two years. Paris had hoped to transfer power to a government led by the pro-French leader of the territorial council and to retain some forces and air and port facilities at Djibouti after independence.

According to several French diplomats stationed in east Africa, Paris now plans to:

--Call a meeting of the two domestic political parties and rival liberation movements--one backed by Ethiopia and the other by Somalia--to plan for independence.

--Hold a referendum in the territory, possibly supervised by observers from the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the Arab League, as early as June to elect a new government.

--Make clear to local leaders that France does not insist on retaining its forces and facilities in the area after independence.

A personal representative of the French President will visit Somalia, Ethiopia, and apparently some Arab capitals in the next few weeks to discuss the composition of a local government and problems relating to the territory's security after independence.

We believe the negotiations are unlikely to result in a compromise settlement that would be acceptable to all parties for any length of time.

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President Siad has reacted favorably to the French initiative because he views the withdrawal of French troops as enhancing Somalia's ability to gain control of the territory.

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Ethiopia, on the other hand, will see the French plans as favorable to Somalia, and will almost certainly consider moves to forestall a Somali takeover.

The French ambassador in Mogadiscio informed a US embassy officer that France has "told" Moscow to "respect the wishes of the territory's people." He implied that Paris had suggested that Franco-Soviet relations could suffer if Somalia does not cooperate with French efforts to withdraw gracefully from the territory and to guarantee its security for at least a brief period after independence.

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France would prefer to remain in Djibouti because of its relative closeness both to the Middle East and France's home waters.

Djibouti is France's only major naval base remaining in the Indian Ocean. Its strategic location near the entrance to the Red Sea enables the French to protect key oil supply routes to the West and monitor Soviet naval activity in the Gulf of Aden. Operating out of Djibouti, the French Indian Ocean flotilla is the largest Western naval force in the ocean and is nearly the same size as the Soviet contingent.

If the French are forced to relinquish the base, they almost certainly will have to increase the number of supply and support craft assigned to the area--at least for the near term. They also will be forced to rely more heavily on their limited support facilities at Reunion, an island east of the Malagasy Republic.

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EGYPT-USSR

Egyptian President Sadat has told our ambassador in Cairo that General Secretary Brezhnev has flatly refused a new request that the Soviets honor their commitment to replace Egyptian equipment lost during the October 1973 war. The Soviets also did not agree to reschedule Cairo's debt.

According to Sadat, Brezhnev asserted that Soviet assistance cannot be separated from political realities. Since Egypt is taking itself out of the socialist camp, there is no reason for continued assistance. Sadat now professes to be convinced that the Soviets are determined to bring him down.

There is little independent evidence that the Soviets are ready to push their tenuous relationship with Sadat to the breaking point. Moscow is anticipating another period of polemical exchange with Egypt, however, and expects Sadat to comment on the state of the relationship in his speech on Sunday.

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NOTES

Thai military leaders are strongly critical of the Foreign Ministry's handling of negotiations on a residual US military presence.

The military is upset that Prime Minister Khu-krit and Foreign Minister Chatchai "railroaded" through the cabinet meeting on March 9 a policy position to the effect that the US must accept Thai sovereignty and jurisdiction over the residual US military facilities and personnel by March 20 or withdraw them. The Prime Minister's hard line apparently stems from his concern over having to defend in the April 4 general election any new agreement. He promised last March to bring about the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Thailand within a year.

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The public executions this week of 30 Nigerian military officers for their alleged roles in the coup attempt and the assassination last month of the country's chief of state are likely to heighten ethnic and religious suspicions.

The executions obviously are intended as a warning to other would-be coup makers. They also may be designed to placate the Muslim Hausas of the north because many of those executed apparently were members of the predominately Christian minority tribes of central Nigeria.

The secrecy of the trials and hasty executions this week will not sit well with many Nigerians, especially the minorities.

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